POEM INTO POEM

WORLD POETRY IN MODERN VERSE TRANSLATION

INTRODUCED AND EDITED BY

George Steiner

PENGUIN BOOKS

1970

INTRODUCTION

THAT it is untranslatable is one of the definitions offered of poetry. What remains after the attempt, intact and uncommunicated, is the original poem. So affirmed du Bellay, the French poet and rhetorician of the early sixteenth century, so, more recently, Robert Frost. A poem is language in the most intense mode of expressive integrity, language under such close pressure of singular need, of particularized energy, that no other statement can be equivalent, that no other poem even if it differs only in one phrase, perhaps one word, can do the same job. The poem is because nothing exactly like it has been before, because its very composition is an act of unique designation, of naming some previously anonymous or inchoate experience as Adam named the creatures of life. A painting divides space between self and the whole; so a poem divides experience between itself and 'otherness'. How can identity be translated into anything but itself? This is the admonition of Borges's acid fable of a man translating *Don Quixote* into identical Spanish, line by line and word for word.

Add to this the nature of poetic language. The distinctive beat of any given tongue, that sustaining undercurrent of inflexion, pitch relations, habits of stress, which give a particular motion to prose, is concentrated in poetry so that it acts as an overt, characteristic force. Poetry will not translate any more than music. Verse forms, the shape of the stanza, the conventional or innovating directives of rhyme, the historical, stylistic discriminations which a language makes between its prosaic and poetic idiom, the counterpoint it sets up between colloquial and formal, these also defy translation. As does the immediate visual code of long and short words, of capitalization and accentual mark in German, say, or Spanish. And how can a translation carry over into a Roman alphabet the pictorial suggestions, the relations of space and graphic incitement which are a vital part of the total statement made by a Chinese or Persian lyric?

In short: because a poem enlists the maximal range of linguistic means, because it articulates the code of any given language at its most incisive – all other poems in that language being a part of the informing context – poetry may be paraphrased, imperfectly mimed but 'indeed cannot be translated'. To which Dr Johnson adds, 'and therefore it is the poet that preserves language'.

But let us observe the argument closely. It cuts much deeper than verse. It implicates even rudimentary acts of linguistic exchange, the attempt to translate any word or sentence from one language into another. A language is not a passive representation of reality, it does not restrict itself to being a mirror. It is an active world image, selecting certain possibilities of human analysis and behaviour, certain ways of initiating, structuring and recording experience from a total potentiality of representation. Each language cuts out its segment of reality. We live our world as we speak it (to ourselves or to others), as it feeds back to us through the particular linguistic code most immediate to our culture and personal up-bringing. We cast the net of our own language over the multiplicity of living forms. Loosely woven, it will draw in experience in gross, indiscriminate lumps; the landscape of being is made incoherent and monotonous by illiterate speech. Close knit, the language-net makes available to us the largest possible range – possible to our physiological and historical condition – of differentiated, mastered, potentially related elements.

A large vocabulary signifies a literal wealth and concreteness of felt life. A developed syntax engenders those perceptions of interrelation, those creative re-groupings of thought and action called metaphor. Without metaphor a society remains static, repetitive, as is a child's song. Our world, the way we move among its total possibilities, springs from grammar, from the pattern by which we relate identity, verb and object. Each grammar differs in some degree from any other. Thus there is not the same life-image in *j'ai mal à la tête* as in *mi duole il capo*. Neither is exactly equivalent, though one is nearer than the other, to *I have a headache*. No two languages mesh perfectly, no two languages – and there may be some three thousand spoken by men – set the world in the same order.

Even the simplest words, indeed they especially, carry a charge of specific energy, of historical association, social usage and syntactic tradition. They rise to the surface of speech from great depths of national or regional sensibility, barnacled with undeclared remembrance. *Pain* is not wholly rendered by *bread*. It has to a French ear resonances of want, of radical demand, which the English word does not; the two words differ in historical texture as does a French from an English loaf. There is no synonym in either French or English for German *heimat* (though *terroir* carries some of the relevant over-

tones). The interweaving of concrete and spiritual patrimony, of obligation and pride, concentrated in the German term has no full equivalent in the English vocabulary nor, through crucial, necessary correspondence of idiom with world-image, in English historical and political practice. We can define the Greek optative as a mode of the verb articulating wish, desire, uncertain hope; but no optative can be completely reproduced in a grammar, one would almost say in a metaphysic, which lacks this particular shade of futurity. Or to cite an example familiar to Biblical translation: as there is no concept of snow, hence no word for it, in a number of African languages, the conventional equivalent for *white as snow* is *white as egret feathers*. This 'equivalent' is entirely devoid of the tactile, emotive overtones, of the latent metaphors of chill, shrouding action, even of the colour-spectrum associated with our Middle-English, ultimately Sanskrit word.

There are no total translations: because languages differ, because each language represents a complex, historically and collectively determined aggregate of values, proceedings of social conduct, conjectures on life. There can be no exhaustive transfer from language A to language B, no meshing of nets so precise that there is identity of conceptual content, unison of undertone, absolute symmetry of aural and visual association. This is true both of a simple prose statement and of poetry.

The point is worth stressing. Where they engage, as they must, the root fact of linguistic autonomy, the fact that different grammars delineate different realities, arguments against verse translation are arguments against all translation. The difference is one of intensity, of technical difficulty, of psychological apprehension. Because a poem springs from the core of a language, commemorating and renewing the world view of that language at its deepest level, the risks taken in translation are greater, the waste or damage done more visible. But a gritty colloquialism will frequently offer a resistance as vital and obstinate.

Each act of translation is one of approximation, of near miss or failure to get within range. It tells of our fragmented legacy, and of the marvellous richness of that legacy – how meagre must the earth have been before Babel, when all spoke alike and communicated on the instant. The case against translation is irrefutable, but only if we are presented, in Ibsen's phrase, with 'the claims of the ideal'.

In actual performance these claims cannot be met or allowed. They have been discarded, obviously, in our economic, political, private affairs. Men's undertakings proceed by linguistic barter in a zone of approximate, utilitarian definition. School primers, tourists' phrase-books, manuals of commercial and technical usage, our ordinary lexica, establish a neutral ground of rough-edged but indispensable concordance. The multiplicity of scientific developments, the fact that science operates internationally and at its own forward edge, have made of the translation of scientific papers a large-scale, urgent enterprise. Some of the difficulties met resemble those which arise in the translation of poetry, the main difference being that mathematics is a true esperanto, a perfectly conventional yet dynamic code such as no artificial or inter-language can be.

Translation is equally essential to humanism, to the continued life of feeling. We translate perpetually – this is often overlooked – when we read a classic in our own tongue, a poem written in the sixteenth century or a novel published in 1780. We seek to recapture, to revitalize in our consciousness the meanings of words used as we no longer use them, of imaginings that have behind them a contour of history, of manners, of religious or philosophic presumptions radically different from ours. Anyone reading Donne or Jane Austen today, or almost any poem or fiction composed before 1915 (at about which date the old order seems to recede from the immediate grasp of our sensibility), is trying to re-create by exercise of historical, linguistic response; he is, in the full sense, translating. As is the player who acts Shakespeare or Congreve, making that which was conceived in a society, in a style of feeling, in an expressive convention sharply different from that of the modern, actual, active to the touch of our mind and nerve.

No language, moreover, however comprehensive, however resourceful and inclusive its syntax, covers more than a fraction of human realization. There are, at every moment and on every horizon worlds beyond our own words. Hence the urge to cross the barriers of national speech, the effort to make other insights, other tools of awareness, available. What man has the linguistic wealth needed to read in the original Homer, the Bible, Shakespeare, Pascal, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the poems of Li Po and *A Tale of the Genji*? Yet which would one be prepared to do without or discard from the adventure of literacy? A major, perhaps a predominant element in our

culture, in the fabric of our consciousness, is inevitably translation. 'Say what one will of its inadequacy,' wrote Goethe to Carlyle, 'translation remains one of the most important, worthwhile concerns in the totality of world affairs.' Without it we would live in arrogant parishes bordered by silence.

So much will probably be allowed by almost anyone. But what of the more special argument that poetry should not be translated into poetry – that the only honest translation of a poem is a literal trot or a prose paraphrase? This is clearly implied in Dante's statement, 'nothing which is harmonized by the bond of the Muses can be changed from its own to another language without having all its sweetness destroyed'. It is the conclusion arrived at by Sir Richard Burton when considering the translation of Arabic verse. Today it is put most drastically by Nabokov: 'The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.' To say that Dante and Nabokov have themselves produced brilliant verse translation, that the art of poetic translation is almost as old as poetry itself, that it continues intensely alive, is true enough. But it is no refutation. The case for the interlinear or the prose paraphrase is, in fact, a strong one.

It can be met only if the exercise of poetic translation exhibits advantages, means of critical understanding, qualities of linguistic gain which no prose version matches. It must be shown that there is even in the inevitable compromise of verse translation, even in its necessary defeats – perhaps characteristically in these – a creative residue, a margin of experienced if not fully communicated illumination which no trot or prose statement offers. It is precisely this, I think, which *can* be shown. A 'clumsy literal translation' of a living poem is none at all; a prose paraphrase is an important auxiliary, but no more. To find active echo, a poem must incite to a poem.

Because it is unalterably itself in its own language, a poem yields little of its genius to prose. Though there are styles (the neo-classic for instance) which appropriate the sinew and directness of prose, the two media are in essence different. The poem does not accept the routine and short-hand of experience set down in prose, thinned out in the mainly inert figures of daily speech; by constant definition the poem works against the grain of the ordinary. This creative insurgence is the very start of the poem; the poet seeks to scandalize our acceptances, to make new and rebellious. Thus even at its most

spacious a prose paraphrase signifies a good deal less to a poem than does a piano transcription to an orchestral score.

Consider this passage from Book VI of the *Iliad* (Glaukos' answer to Diomedes' war-challenge):

> Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
> Now green in youth, now withering on the ground;
> Another race the following spring supplies;
> They fall successive, and successive rise:
> So generations in their course decay;
> So flourish these, when those are passed away.
> But if thou still persist to search my birth,
> Then hear a tale that fills the spacious earth.

> As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.
> The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber
> burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning.
> So one generation of men will grow while another
> dies. Yet if you wish to learn all this and be certain
> of my genealogy: there are plenty of men who know it.

Men in their generation are like the leaves of the trees. The wind blows and one year's leaves are scattered on the ground; but the trees burst into bud and put on fresh ones when the spring comes round. In the same way one generation flourishes and another nears its end. But if you wish to hear about my family, I will tell you the tale – most people know it already.

Pope's is undoubtedly the most satisfactory of the three versions, for its discipline and alert pace; the fourth line illustrates how the energy of precise etymology – Pope's confident control of the Latinate *successive* – quickens our entire imaginative response, so that we very nearly experience a graphic action. But it is the best version primarily because Pope's idiom is most fully committed to the fact that the *Iliad* is a poem, that its design and effect are poetic. For all its formulaic scruple, Richmond Lattimore's text is, at this particular point, far less persuasive; and this so exactly in the measure in which its looser syntax and vocabulary incline to the very different precisions or contractions of prose (*genealogy: there are plenty of men who know it*). E. V. Rieu's translation is by much the feeblest of the three. Inspired by the wish – at the time almost a social, expressly didactic motive – to make Homer widely popular, to present the *Iliad* as a timeless

yarn, Rieu sacrificed poetic form to an agile, colloquial prose. But not altogether; Rieu's uneasiness about the enterprise leads, in the passage quoted, to the bits of interior rhyme (*ground/round, year's/nears*) and 'fossil' cadences of blank verse, both damaging.

The point is simply this: though always imperfect, a verse translation, in that it re-presents, re-enacts that selection of language, that stylization or innovation of syntax inseparable from the nature of poetic composition, is more responsible to the intent, to the movement of spirit in the original than a downward transfer into prose can ever be.

This example makes a second point. Each time a poem is translated, initiating a new poem, the original finds new and active life in present awareness. Translation gives to the metaphor of classic survival, of the unbroken forward-acting role of literature a solid reality. As it could in no other way, the Homeric epic, in the uninterrupted sequence of translations from Chapman and Hobbes to Robert Fitzgerald and Christopher Logue, is at work in English literature, is interwoven with the fabric of the language and of the English and American poetic tradition. Verse re-presentations of Horace and Catullus are fully implicit in the development of English satire, of the English domestic lyric and love poem. Shakespearean translation is crucially a part of the late growth, of the coming to self-confidence, of German classic and romantic verse. The classic wanes to the status of the academic or falls silent unless it is re-appropriated by translation, unless the living poet examines and affirms its relevance to the current idiom (for want of vital translation Lucretius is, at present, inert).

But poetic translation is not only a living spark, a flow of energy between past and present and between cultures (immersion, so far as we may experience it, in another language being as close as we can come to a second self, to breaking free of the habitual skin or tortoise-shell of our consciousness); poetic translation plays a unique role inside the translator's own speech. It drives inward. Anyone translating a poem, or attempting to, is brought face to face, as by no other exercise, with the genius, bone-structure and limitations of his native tongue. Because that tongue is our constant landscape, we almost grow oblivious to its horizon, we take it to be the only or privileged space of being. Translation taxes and thus makes inventory of our resources. It compels us to realize that there are raw materials

we lack, stocks of feeling, instruments of expression, inlets to awareness which our own linguistic territory does not possess or has failed to exploit. This last recognition can be a powerful stimulus: witness Baudelaire's and Mallarmé's determination to import from Poe a brand of unreason and murky brilliance which they felt lacking in French, or Goethe's efforts to bend a European language towards the greater multiplicity of erotic nuance, of amorous-philosophic congruence which he had observed in oriental poetry. Poetic translation enriches by what it reveals of our poverties.

Its necessary failures, the fact that the original cannot be rendered exhaustively, that we cannot retrace the steps of the poet had he conceived the poem in our own language, are often uniquely positive. The inadequacies of a significant translation are creative of insight, critically revealing as no other reading of a poem is. To the poet who translates and to the reader who has access to both languages that is the justifying paradox. What remains uncommunicated after translation is not *the poem* or even its essential elements. Depending on the case, what fails to come across may be structures of spirit peculiar to the original language, networks of historical or phonetic association, a grid of immediate symbolic recognitions or idiomatic shorthand unrecapturable because they are so firmly localized in a specific cultural milieu, society, historical epoch remote from our own. No translation by a later poet (unless, perhaps, he is working from an African or aboriginal context) can simulate the collective, orally conceived resonance of Homeric formulae. Dante's difficulties and good fortune in composing, literally, a new vulgate, cannot be fully mirrored in any translation using a language already established and burdened with poetic precedent. The relative interchangeability of the parts of speech in a German sentence, of which Rilke makes a means of suspended motion and contrary definition, will not pass into French syntax.

But each of these defeats is creative. It penetrates and identifies the genius of the original; it communicates that genius to us by what it fails to re-produce. A great poetic translation – Hölderlin's Sophokles, Valéry's restatement of Virgil's *Eclogues*, Robert Lowell's readings of Heine – is criticism in the highest sense. It surrounds the original with a zone of unmastered meaning, an area in which the original declares its own singular life. It is the job of all genuine literary criticism to fall short, to make explicit by its own precisely

honest inadequacy, the genius of that it focuses on. The piece of criticism accumulates whatever linguistic, historical, referential insights it can command and make relevant; but it must show in the process that this accumulation comes to less than the sum of the poem. What the poem says criticism cannot fully restate; criticism is most valid where it makes the margin of difference lucid, where it draws around the work of the poet a barrier of light.

The poetic translator does the same, but goes deeper because he takes larger risks. The circle he traces around the original illumines not only the text he is translating but his own art and person. In Roy Campbell's versions of Baudelaire we note a three-fold action and radical honesty: a re-presentment of Baudelaire's poems, a critical perception of the genius of those poems by virtue of what is incomplete in the translation, and a necessary disclosure of what may be facile or coarse-grained in Campbell's own idiom. The process of perceptive engagement is strictly comparable only to that which occurs when a composer sets a major poem, when Britten, for example, 'translates' Blake or Rimbaud.

At its best, the peculiar synthesis of conflict and complicity between a poem and its translation into another poem creates the impression of a 'third language', of a medium of communicative energy which somehow reconciles both languages in a tongue deeper, more comprehensive than either. In the no-man's-land between du Bellay's *Heureux qui comme Ulysse* and Chesterton's English sonnet, so nearly exhaustive of the original, we seem to hear '*encore l'immortelle parole*', Mallarmé's expression for the notion of a universal, immediate tongue from which English and French had broken off. This experience of what the German critic Walter Benjamin termed a 'lost totality', an underlying unison in the mystery of human speech, is the ideal towards which translation strives. It cannot be fulfilled. Translations range from those which traduce to those which transfigure. Transfiguration, the version which surpasses the original as Baudelaire excels Poe, is perhaps the more lasting betrayal. But the attempt to translate must be made, the risks taken, if that tower in Babel is to be more than ruin. It has been made, with particular wealth and vigour, in the period from *c.* 1870 to the present.

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What follows is a selection of translations by English and American poets of poetry from twenty-two languages. It begins with Gladstone's rendition of Horace III, 30, published in 1863, as fair illustration of the old style, and extends to 1965 with a previously unpublished translation of Neruda.

The first principle of selection has been that the English or American poem should have a distinct autonomy, that it should be worth reading in its own right. A good number of these verse translations rank with the best poetry written in English in our time. Secondarily, this anthology seeks to indicate the history of modern poetic translation, the passage from Victorian 'classic paraphrase' to what Robert Lowell, as did Dryden and Ben Jonson before him, calls 'imitation'. It also tries to suggest how classic, Oriental, French or Spanish poetry have interacted with the development of the modern Anglo-American verse idiom. But the historical consideration which would, for instance, have called for the inclusion of Witter Bynner's *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1915), a decisive document in the growth of the modern tone, has been secondary to that of pleasure, of the wish to show what fine poetry has come of the dialogue between languages, cultures and historical periods.

A few texts have been omitted because permission to republish has not been given: among them Nabokov's exquisite translations of lyrics by Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev. Legal convention allows me to smuggle in one stanza:

> Soft sand comes up to our horses' shanks
> as we ride in the darkening day
> and the shadows of pines have closed their ranks:
> all is shadow along our way.

I am conscious of the omission of translations from African and American Indian song and poetry, a field in which Sir Maurice Bowra has been a pioneer, and which is beginning to modify our notion of world literature. I have also left out translations from the Persian and Arabic; perhaps wrongly, I feel that those I have seen move in a saccharine limbo between the original and the natural shapes of English. With one brief exception, I have found myself

discarding translations of Pindar, Hölderlin and Leopardi. These three poets seem to mark the limits of possible re-statement. Translations do not throw light on them but a penumbra.

The main ground for omission, however, has been quite simply and brutally lack of space. It would not be difficult to fill a volume twice this size. With several interesting exceptions such as Dylan Thomas, who knew no other language, and Wallace Stevens, whose uses of English were deliberately permeable to the insinuations of Latin, French and Italian, there is scarcely an important English or American poet since the Victorians who has not been a translator as well. Periodicals such as *Nine* and *Arion* have been devoted largely to poetic translation and to the theory and problems of the art. As I write, a new journal concerned exclusively with the translation of foreign verse into English is being started in London. The period from Rossetti to Robert Lowell has been an age of poetic translation rivalling that of the Tudor and Elizabethan masters. In range of linguistic response it has clearly surpassed the sixteenth century. Why should this be?

There is no single, obvious answer. A contrary force has been at work in the modern sensibility: a hunger for lineage, for informing tradition, and a simultaneous impulse to make all things new. Both currents would lead to the revaluation and 'modernization' of classic and medieval literature. There has also been a characteristic internationalization of the poetic temper. We find in the work of Eliot, Pound, Apollinaire, Valéry, Rilke, Mayakovsky, Neruda, a shared logic of emotion, an agreed code of reference and symbolic device. Modern poets are alert to each other's performance; much modern verse is directly or by force of echo filled with cross-reference to other poetry, to other cultures. Poetic translation is the most open, deliberate mode of reference.

The instability of contemporary norms, the tendency to regard our morals and canons of taste as purely relative or provisional, has meant that alien cultures, alien conventions of feeling, exercise a peculiar fascination on the western mind. The Javanese tone sequence in a Debussy score, the African mask in a Picasso, the translations of Hindi or Nigerian lyrics into English verse, embody a common appetite for renewal, for the vitalizing shock, and a common guilt towards that which we have too long pillaged or scorned as mere colonizers.

There appear to be economic and sociological factors in the brilliance and profusion of modern poetic translation, particularly in America (Marianne Moore, Richmond Lattimore, Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, Robert Fitzgerald, William Arrowsmith). In American culture the desire for tradition, for precedent, in the classic past, collides with a widespread ignorance of foreign languages and history. Few know Greek in Athens (Georgia) or Latin in Rome (Illinois). Yet the sentiment that Homer and Juvenal are part of the status of civilized consciousness remains genuine. It has found an influential economic and technological ally in the activities of the American university campus and in the hunger of the paperback. To keep the machines fed, paperback publishers have raided the past and the foreign (half a dozen versions of Homer in the last ten years). Like the BBC in England, American academic and commercial editors have directly commissioned much of the best of recent verse translation. Robert Fitzgerald's *Odyssey*, William Merwin's Spanish ballads, the versions of Greek drama by Arrowsmith and the Chicago group, were made possible by this new patronage and the mass-market of the campus bookstore.

As important as all these reasons put together, however, and central to the manner and controversial liberties of the modern form, is the achievement of one man. If our age of poetic translation rivals that of Golding, Gavin Douglas and Chapman, it is because of the teaching and example of Ezra Pound.

The whole of Pound's writing may be seen as an act of translation, as the appropriation to an idiom radically his own of a fantastic rag-bag of languages, cultural legacies, historical echoes, stylistic models. 'To consider Pound's original work and his translation separately,' notes Eliot, 'would be a mistake, a mistake which implies a greater mistake about the nature of translation.' Pound has been the master jackdaw in the museum and scrap-heap of civilization, the courier between far places of the mind, the contriver of a chaotic patchwork of values which, on decisive occasion, and by some great gift of irascible love, fuse into a strange coherence. As A. Alvarez has said, Pound manages to write English verse as if Shakespeare had not written before him, a scandal and liberation made possible by his raids on Provençal and French, on Latin and Chinese (be it off the silk-scroll or the tea-crate), on Whitman and Heine. Within this general plunder, Pound's actual translations play

a vital part. They have altered the definition and ideals of verse translation in the twentieth century as surely as Pound's poetry has renewed or subverted modern English and American poetics.

A first look at nearly any translation in this anthology is enough to show whether it comes before or after the *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1917/1934). But the 'making new' of translation had already occurred in *Personae* (1909) and *Provença* (1910). After 'The River Merchant's Wife' (1915) the art of translation had entered its modern phase.

Pound's actual repertoire and range of enthusiasm were not as novel as might appear. The focus on the Greek lyrics, on Catullus, on Provençal and Tuscan poetry, on Villon, Baudelaire and Verlaine had already been defined by the Victorian translators, by Rossetti, Swinburne, Arthur Symons and Ernest Dowson. Arthur Waley, four years younger than Pound, was at work independently, shaping and exploiting a growing interest in Chinese and Japanese literature. Indeed, so far as actual range goes, the modern canon was essentially set down by the translators of the 1880s and 1890s. What they neglected or thought irrelevant – Lucretius, Tibullus, Latin poetry of the renaissance and baroque, the French neo-classics, the poetry of Goethe and Schiller – has not yet moved into the light. New renditions of Villon continue incessant when there are, as yet, hardly any of Maurice Scève, for instance, or Vigny. Pound broadened and gave critical orthodoxy to a body of values and emotional responses established by his pre-Raphaelite and Edwardian predecessors. What he revolutionized was the idiom of translation, the notion of what a translation is and of how it relates to the original.

Marianne Moore has summarized this revolution with her customary abruptness: 'the natural order of words, subject, predicate, object; the active voice where possible; a ban on dead words, rhymes synonymous with gusto.' These precepts stand for a whole vision of active re-statement. Pound's translations of Rihaku, Andreas Divus, Laforgue, Sophocles are re-enactments of the original poetic deed in the cadence, tonality, idiomatic stress of the modern. The translation exacts from the original the utmost of felt relevance; it carries to extreme Kierkegaard's dictum, 'It is not worth while remembering that past which cannot become a present'. In Pound's *mimesis*, Propertius and Cavalcanti 'become a present' so immediate to the ways we experience language and objectify emotion that the

Latin or Provençal poem is inseparable from the grammar of modernity. Pound's impact reaches far beyond the texts he himself has rendered; thus Ronald Knox's re-creation of the 'Lamentations of Jeremias' plainly reflects the rhythm and tone-colour of 'The Seafarer'.

But are these 'translations' by Pound and his numerous successors – Marianne Moore, Robert Lowell, Christopher Logue – translations in any proper sense? Or are they what Dryden terms *imitation*, 'where the translator (if he now has not lost that name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the ground-work, as he pleases'? A practice, adds Dryden, that is 'the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead'.

The quarrel over Pound's *Propertius* goes on (with recent argument suggesting that Pound's scholarship was not as hollow as professional Latinists would have it). Arrowsmith's treatment of Aristophanes and Robert Lowell's *Imitations* of Baudelaire or Pasternak pose it anew. It is, in part, a quarrel over semantics; the fact of radical change is no longer in doubt. The contemporary translator and even reader of classic verse comes after Pound as the modern painter comes after Cubism. Inevitably, much of the translation in this book implies and was made possible by Pound's enlargement of the term. I have taken translation to include *the writing of a poem in which a poem in another language (or in an earlier form of one's own language) is the vitalizing, shaping presence; a poem which can be read and responded to independently but which is not ontologically complete, a previous poem being its occasion, begetter, and in the literal sense, raison d'être.*

This is the definition implicit in the modern movement, in the extraordinary wealth and energy of verse translation, representation, imitation from Rossetti to George MacBeth. It cannot be rigorous; there are borderline cases which poet and reader play by ear. In this collection I have taken it to include Christopher Logue's ferocious re-statements of the *Iliad* – in which every modern line seems to me explicitly directed towards Homer's survivance, towards the presentment and 'presentness' of his songs – but to exclude Auden's 'Shield of Achilles' which is a commentary on, a critique from without of Homeric motifs. But the distinction can never be absolute.

Each poem in this book should have the original on the facing

page. A prose paraphrase, perhaps bracketing the principal difficulties, should fill the margin as in a polyglot Bible. This is the only completely honest format for a reader and user of poetic translation. Obvious, though none the less obstructive reasons of size, economy, 'general appeal' have made this impossible. But this anthology would defeat itself if it did not, in whatever languages are accessible to him, return the reader to the original; if it did not direct him from the living mirror, however luminous, to the primary object. To *trans/late:* to carry over from what has been silent to what is vocal, from the distant to the near. But also to carry back.

GEORGE STEINER